

GAO Report Finds Los Alamos Security Problems Still Not Fully Addressed

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Reps.

John D. Dingell, D-Mich., and Joe Barton, R-Texas, the chairman and ranking member of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, along with Reps. Bart Stupak, D-Mich., and John Shimkus, R-Ill., the chairman and ranking member of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, asked GAO to assess whether LANL had fixed its security and management problems and, if not, whether certain operations should be considered for relocation to facilities with better security.

“Many

of the initiatives LANL is undertaking to address laboratory-wide security problems were previously identified in external security evaluations. However, we found that significant security problems identified in these evaluations have not been fully addressed,” GAO said in its report entitled, “Los Alamos Laboratory: Long Term Strategies Needed to Improve Security and Oversight.” “Specifically, while LANL's storage of classified parts in unapproved storage containers and its process for ensuring that actions to correct identified security deficiencies have been cited in external security evaluations for years, complete security solutions in these areas have not yet been implemented.”

“Although DOE issued a \$300,000 fine and compliance order, and LANL has consolidated some of its classified information, GAO found that it will take three to four more years before the contractor has the management systems in place to ensure that security improvements are sustained,” said Dingell. “World War II was prosecuted in less time than it is taking DOE and its contractor to bring a robust security system into force at this nuclear weapons lab.”

“Regrettably, the security problems at Los Alamos no longer seem to shock and appall. A dozen hearings by the Energy and Commerce Committee revealed, confirmed and reconfirmed that the lab was run more like a corner hamburger stand than the crown jewel of the nation’s nuclear weapons program,” Barton said. “Most frustrating was a culture that treated America’s nuclear secrets like leftover napkins. Now GAO has joined the list of those who visit LANL and its overseer, NNSA, identify their security problems and recommend solutions. Good for GAO. I sincerely hope that its report will have the desired impact.”

Despite a decade of major security breaches, and DOE’s repeated declarations that improving security was a high priority, the GAO found that the terms of DOE’s contract with Los Alamos National Security, LLC, does not provide “meaningful financial incentives for strategic security improvements.” For example, of the \$51.3 million available for incentive fees, only \$1.43 million is associated with objective measures of security performance; for the current fiscal year. GAO suggests that financial incentives “should be focused on the long term improvement of security program effectiveness.”

GAO further recommends that the national lab develop a strategic security plan that focuses on improving security program effectiveness and addresses all identified security weaknesses, and that it develop a plan that takes an integrated view of physical and cyber security.

GAO also found that, despite its January 2007 recommendations, the Los Alamos Site Office, which is charged with monitoring contractor performance on behalf of taxpayers, “continues to suffer from a shortage of security personnel” and “lacks funding for needed security training.”

Security lapses have been recognized at LANL since the 1980s, and all the good intentions and promises in the world didn’t seem capable of fixing them. In 2004, all operations were

suspended for a stand-down due to multiple security incidents related to mishandling classified material. The stand-down cost an estimated \$370 million.

The next year, hackers stole the names and Social Security numbers of 1,500 NNSA employees, but the administrator neglected to tell either the energy secretary or the victims about it for nine months. Then, in 2006, 1,588 pages of classified information, including nuclear weapons material, were removed from a classified vault by a contractor who downloaded information onto a "thumb-drive" and removed it from the lab.

"According to GAO, DOE has yet to put its money where its mouth is," said Stupak. "DOE has pumped up the contractor's potential award fees from \$7 million to \$70 million, but only allocated \$1.43 million to security performance. This is a weak incentive. It is inexplicable, given the troubled history of security failures at Los Alamos, that the Secretary has yet to hire sufficient federal staff to oversee its contractor's security or provide funding for needed training, even though GAO pointed this out 18 months ago."

"This GAO report confirms, once again, the shortcomings of security at Los Alamos. Recommendations go unheeded or at least uncompleted," Shimkus said. "Our nation's nuclear security programs should be protected, and they appear not to be."

[GAO report »](#)